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Senate

The Senate met at 1:00 p.m. and was called to order by the President pro tempore (Mr. STEVENS).

PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

Eternal Spirit, You are not only just and holy, but Your mercies endure forever. Because of Your goodness, we receive Your forgiveness and love. Forgive our past mistakes and give us new hearts that we might serve You with passion.

Today, bless our Senators physically, mentally, and spiritually. Strengthen them so that they will control their tongues, actions, minds, and hearts. Preserve them in soundness of mind that all their decisions will be made for Your glory.

We pray in Your holy Name. Amen.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The PRESIDENT pro tempore led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America, and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

RESERVATION OF LEADER TIME

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. Under the previous order, leadership time is reserved.

RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

SCHEDULE

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, today we will return to debate on several health care proposals. We had previously slated this week to consider two medical liability, medical malpractice reform

ills, as well as the small business health plan bill reported by the HELP Committee. Because there was an objection to proceeding to each of these three bills, I was forced to file cloture last week on each of these bills on the motion to proceed. Thus, the first vote will be at 5:15 today on one of the medical liability bills and the second medical liability bill, if we do not get cloture on the first, to follow.

At 5:15, the vote will be on the Medical Care Access Protection Act of 2006, S. 22. If cloture is not invoked on that comprehensive bill, the Senate will then immediately vote to invoke cloture on the motion to proceed to S. 23, the Healthy Mothers and Healthy Babies Access To Care Act. That second bill is similar to the first, S. 22, but limits itself to litigation and focuses just on obstetrical and gynecological care.

If the Senate is not able to turn to either of these pieces of legislation, the next vote we will have will be tomorrow morning, Tuesday morning, on cloture on the motion to proceed to S. 1955, the Health Insurance Marketplace Modernization and Affordability Act. This is the bill reported by Chairman ENZI's committee called the small business health plans bill. The bill is intended to aid small business owners by giving them more power to negotiate for affordable insurance for their employees and their families.

We have set aside debate throughout the day today to allow Senators to speak on any of these three health care measures. I look forward to the debate on each of these issues—each very important—as we look at the overall affordability of health care, the access to health care, as well as the quality of health care for all Americans.

HEALTH CARE REFORM

Mr. FRIST. Mr. President, at this point I would like to briefly extend some comments I made at the end of

last week on the issue of the medical liability bills that are before this body.

On Friday, the Senate filed cloture on the medical liability reform bill—or actually two bills—and we will vote on at least one of those bills today, this afternoon. All of this centers around the fact that our broken medical liability system is hurting every American, every patient, every physician, and the health care system. But the important thing is that it hurts every American. It is an issue that, as a physician as well as a Senator, concerns me deeply. Indeed, it needs to concern and should concern every single American who is walking or will walk into a doctor's office. That is because every American is suffering from the high costs which are totally unnecessary and, in many ways, frivolous and out of control.

A litigation lottery system is what it really is that we suffer from today. Each year, health care costs are rising three to four times faster than the average American's paycheck, and that is in part—in part—driven by this litigation lottery system, a system that is driving up costs, and when it drives up costs, it drives up the premiums that not just doctors pay, because those premiums are passed on to the patients and potential patients, but it drives up costs, diminishes access to health care today, and thus diminishes quality for every American. Access to quality issues are equally important to the costs, but they are all interrelated.

Innocent doctors and patients are being punished because of the greed of a few opportunistic trial lawyers who are exploiting the system the way it is currently configured. Thus, the legislation that we propose and that we hope we will be able to debate on the floor reforms that system—it fixes the system—with a sense of fairness and commonsense reform.

This is an issue which I have been compelled to bring back to the floor again and again, really on principle, because it is the right thing to do. In

• This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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